United Nations A/CN.10/PV.256

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission
256th meeting
Thursday, 6 November 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Maiolini ..... (Italy)

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Pant (Nepal) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Acting Chairman: I declare open the 2004 organizational session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission has been convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters, including the election of the Chairman and other members of the Bureau for 2004 and the adoption of a draft provisional agenda for the next substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

We will not at this stage take up the issue of the election of the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies — that is, the working groups — for obvious reasons. In the absence of agreement on the agenda items to be discussed at next year's substantive session, it would seem premature to elect the chairpersons of the two working groups. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492 of September 1998, both chairpersons will be elected for the full three-year cycle. That in turn will add to the heavy responsibility of chairing the groups' deliberations, and will require serious personal commitment on the part of future chairpersons. In view of those factors, it seems that we should make serious preparations from now on.

Adoption of the agenda

The Acting Chairman: The provisional agenda for this organizational session is contained in document A/CN.10/L.54.

May I take it that the Disarmament Commission adopts the provisional agenda?

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Acting Chairman: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, the Group of Eastern European States has the honour to nominate the candidate for the post of Chairman of the Commission for the 2004 session. I have received a note from the Chairman of that Group informing me that the Group has endorsed such a candidate. It is my distinct pleasure, therefore, to give the floor to the representative of Italy to present to the Commission the candidate for the post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2004 session.

Mr. Trezza (Italy): It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for 2002-2003, Ambassador Mario Maiolini, to nominate His Excellency Revaz Adamia, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations, as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for the 2004 substantive session.

We all know Ambassador Adamia to be an experienced diplomat and consensus-builder. His

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previous experience as Chairman of Georgia's Parliamentary Committee on Armed Services and Security will be an invaluable asset in his role as Chairman of the Commission. We look forward to his leadership and pledge him our full support and cooperation in this important endeavour.

The Acting Chairman: If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Disarmament Commission wishes to elect Ambassador Revaz Adamia of Georgia to the chairmanship of the Commission for its 2004 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman: On behalf of the Commission and on my own behalf, I congratulate Ambassador Adamia on his election to his high office. I express a commonly shared view when I say that we are looking forward to benefiting from his wide experience and diplomatic skills. We wish him success in the discharge of his newly assumed important duties. For our part, we will remain at his service with support and counsel when the need arises.

I invite Ambassador Revaz Adamia to take his place at the podium.

The Chairman: At the outset, I would like to express gratitude to the members of the Disarmament Commission for electing me Chairman of the Commission and for entrusting me with the important task of chairing this organizational session. I consider this to be an acknowledgement of my country's contribution to the important cause of security and disarmament in the region of the Caucasus.

I also wish to thank delegations for their kind words and wishes addressed to me. I will count on the support and cooperation of all Member States in achieving the important goals ahead of the Commission.

Before turning to the next item on our agenda, I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to my predecessor, Ambassador Mario Maiolini, for the guidance and leadership he provided to the Commission. My gratitude also goes to other members of the Bureau and both Chairpersons of the working groups for their valiant and tireless efforts. Finally, let me thank delegations for their constructive spirit and cooperation during the past three years of the Commission's deliberations.

Of course, it is a disappointment for all of us that, at the end of the day, it was not possible to overcome a few remaining obstacles towards the successful conclusion of the Commission's work. It is not an easy task to try to achieve a perfect balance of interests on issues which go to the core of security concepts.

However, I am pleased to note that, despite the inability of the Commission to reach a consensus on these important issues during three years of deliberations, both working groups came very close to agreement. While introducing the draft resolution in the First Committee, Mr. Pant, Vice-Chairman, pointed to positive elements which were agreed upon in the course of three years. I understand that he was expressing an opinion widely held among the members of the Commission.

But this is our past, and I will now invite the Commission to look at the future. Let me make a few general observations about this future as I see it. The 2004 international disarmament calendar is rich with events. The outside world, the community of nations, expects a great deal from those events, and rightfully so. This general optimism is rooted in a number of factors. Let me briefly draw the attention of the Commission to some of them.

First of all, despite the fact that the last three or four years have not been the easiest or most productive ones for the international multilateral disarmament machinery, we still believe that the present international climate not only calls for urgent measures but also allows for a wide variety of undertakings in the field of disarmament.

The international disarmament community has had its share of disappointments in recent years, but it also has had positive achievements to be rightfully proud of. We all share visions of a more secure and peaceful world, and we have the resolve to work towards its realization.

Secondly, the inability of the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission to arrive at tangible results have contributed to a heightened sense of urgency on the part of the international community to reform and revitalize disarmament machinery in such a way that it starts adequately to react and respond to emerging threats to global peace and security. This new element adds to the already existing heavy responsibility which we bear collectively and individually. What happens within

these walls is not an isolated event; it is an integral part of global disarmament efforts at all levels, governmental and non-governmental.

Thirdly, the emergence of new kinds of threats and the fact that they are rapidly thrust into the forefront of security concerns, as well as the need to deal with them without further delay, have created a new atmosphere of great expectation among politicians, disarmament professionals, non-governmental organizations, the academic community and civil society — in other words, among the general public at large.

We hope that this overall atmosphere of great expectation will positively influence the work of the Disarmament Commission in 2004. Here let me refer to the expression of wide support for the Disarmament Commission which came during the session of the First Committee from practically all delegations. Even the criticism levelled at the Commission was constructive. No one questioned its overall usefulness; rather, delegations pointed to the shortcomings and spoke in a businesslike manner of ways and means to make the Commission's work more relevant and responsive to immediate security challenges. We based our approach to the prospects of the Disarmament Commission in 2004 on this support and expressed goodwill.

Election of officers

The Chairman: As is the case with the chairmanship, other officers of the Bureau are also elected on the basis of the established principle of rotation. Accordingly, it is the turn of the Group of Western European and Other States to nominate a candidate for Rapporteur of the Commission for the 2004 substantive session. I wish to inform delegations that the Group is still conducting the necessary consultations and will soon be in a position to nominate its candidate for Rapporteur. The same applies to the Group's choice of a candidate for the post of Vice-Chairman.

Allow me now to proceed with the election of the other members of the Bureau — namely eight Vice-Chairmen. In this connection, I give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Sporýš (Czech Republic): I have the honour and pleasure, on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States and as its outgoing Chairman, to nominate Ms. Amela Sudžuka of Bosnia and Herzegovina as Vice-Chairperson of the Disarmament Commission.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of the Czech Republic for the nomination by the Group of Eastern European States of Ms. Amela Sudžuka as Vice-Chairperson of the Commission.

I give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Udedibia (Nigeria): Let me first congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election. I have the honour and pleasure, on behalf of the African Group, to nominate Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire to serve in the 2004 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission as Vice-Chairmen from Africa. We have full confidence in the ability of those two States to assist you, Sir, in carrying out the work of the session. It will be appreciated if all delegations support this nomination.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Nigeria for his nomination of Mr. Noël-Emmanuel Ahipeaud Guebo of Côte d'Ivoire and Mr. Saad Maandi of Algeria as Vice-Chairmen from the Group of African States.

I give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Cato (Philippines): On behalf of the Asian Group, allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. We are confident that, under your able leadership, we will be able to accomplish the tasks ahead of us.

The Philippines was given the honour of nominating the following Asian Group candidates for the vice-chairmanship of the Commission for 2004: Ambassador Alisher Vohidov of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Mr. Kwang-chul Lew of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of the Philippines for his nomination of Ambassador Alisher Vohidov of Uzbekistan and Mr. Kwang-chul Lew of the Republic of Korea as Vice-Chairmen of the Commission from the Asian Group of States.

I call on the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Gala López (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset, Sir, to join those delegations

that have congratulated you on your election as Chairman of the Commission for the coming year.

It is an honour for our delegation, which holds the current chairmanship of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, to inform the Commission that our Group's two candidates for the vice-chairmanship of the Commission for the 2004 session are Mr. Hugo Flores of the Permanent Mission of Peru and Mr. Frédéric Bijou of the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica — both of whom have experience in the area of disarmament and in the debates of the Disarmament Commission.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Cuba for his nomination of Mr. Hugo Flores of Peru and Mr. Frédéric Bijcu of Costa Rica as Vice-Chairmen from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

We have thus completed this stage of the process of nominations. For the benefit of the Commission, I will announce the countries and individuals that have been nominated by the respective regional groups.

The Group of Eastern European States endorsed the candidacy of Ms. Amela Sudžuka of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Group of Asian States endorsed the candidacies of Ambassador Alisher Vohidov of Uzbekistan and Mr. Lew Kwang-chul of the Republic of Korea; the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States endorsed the candidacies of Mr. Hugo Flores of Peru and Mr. Frédéric Bijou of Costa Rica; and the Group of African States endorsed the candidacies of Ambassador Noël-Emmanuel Ahipeaud Guebo of Côte d'Ivoire and Mr. Saad Maandi of Algeria for the posts of Vice-Chairperson of the Commission.

If I hear no comment, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect the representatives of Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Peru, the Republic of Korea and Uzbekistan as Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission at its 2004 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, warmly to congratulate the elected officers and to wish them success in discharging their duties. I look forward to working with them and count on their counsel.

As I said earlier, consultations are still being carried out within the Group of Western European and Other States. Therefore, I would suggest that the election of Vice-Chairpersons to the remaining posts be taken up at a later stage.

As members of the Commission are aware, the First Committee has recommended for adoption by the General Assembly one draft resolution that has specific bearing on the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity, and for the benefit of members of the Commission, I should like to refer to that draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.1/58/L.20, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the First Committee on 29 October under agenda item 75 (c). The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution — operative paragraphs 5 and 6 — read as follows:

> "*Recommends* that the Disarmament Commission consider the following items at its 2004 substantive session:
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> (a) [To be determined];
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> (b) [To be determined];
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> "*Requests* the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2004, namely from 5 to 23 April, and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session;"

I have just outlined the draft resolution, which contains the mandate for the upcoming work of the Disarmament Commission. Let me at this stage make a few remarks of a procedural as well as of a substantive nature.

Subparagraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph 5 are left blank, and several delegations made comments about this during the First Committee meeting. We fully share their concern. Of course, it would have been better if, at this stage, we had been able to agree on one nuclear and one conventional item, as we are mandated to do. However, that is not the case. We all know that reaching consensus on two substantive items will not be an easy or fast process. Rather, it will require series of consultations, open-ended meetings and some carefully crafted compromise on the part of all delegations.

To facilitate that consensus-building, I intend to consult regional groups and individual delegations and

to hold open-ended meetings with the participation of the full membership of the Commission. These activities will start as early as the first part of January. After the first round of consultations, and based on the views expressed by delegations, I will compile a list of 12 to 14 items — six or seven items each on nuclear and conventional topics — and will present it to members for the second and, if needed, third round of informals. The idea is to have the agreed items well in advance, before the beginning of the Commission's deliberations. That will leave us ample time to select chairpersons for the two working groups, which, as members are aware, will then continue in that capacity until the end of the three-year cycle of deliberations.

Every three years, the Commission and its members are confronted with this problem. Each time, the Commission has been able to overcome natural differences and adopt topics worthy of our focused attention. More often, compromise comes through a prolonged and painful negotiation process, but once in a while life itself supplies items which are acute and do not allow us the luxury of long delays and prevarication. I think that we are at that kind of juncture.

To close this issue by way of historical trivia, I would remind members that the last time, in 2000 — as I have been reminded by the Secretariat — it took 42 informal meetings to arrive at agreement on two items. I hope that, this time around, we will be more efficient with our time and efforts.

Draft provisional agenda for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission in 2004

The Chairman: The draft provisional agenda for the 2004 substantive session is contained in document A/CN.10/L.55.

If there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the draft provisional agenda for the 2004 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The Commission is now invited to take note of document A/CN.10/2004/CRP.1, containing the provisional programme of work and timetable 1, containing somewhat detailed information on the first week of our future work. We will refer to both of those documents shortly.

The Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and meets annually. Its sessions are financed from regular budgets and do not require additional funding. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492 of 1998, the annual substantive sessions of the Commission should last three weeks. Therefore, during the 2004 session, the Commission will work on the basis of our usual practice: a full three-week session. With that in mind, the Secretariat has arranged the dates for the 2004 substantive session: from 5 to 23 April. Those dates were chosen taking into consideration the disarmament calendar for the coming year, especially the Third Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which will follow the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Delegations are kindly asked to take note of those dates.

While we are considering the provisional agenda for the 2004 substantive session, let us also address the establishment of the working groups to deal with the two substantive agenda items. I suggest we now re-establish Working Groups I and II to deal with the two specific items, which, as I mentioned earlier, will be decided upon in the course of consultations. Moreover, as in previous years, we have to establish the Committee of the Whole to deal with other substantive and organizational matters. If there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to establish those three bodies.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I should like to note that, according to the established practice, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Unfortunately, as I have already informed the Commission, we are not in a position to deal with the appointment of two Chairpersons for the subsidiary bodies, since the regional groups will first have to agree on the substantive items for the two Working Groups.

However, there are several issues that have been left pending at this stage, such as the nomination of candidates for the remaining post of Vice-Chairman. As I have said, the process will require some time to be finalized. Accordingly, it might be advisable for the Commission to suspend this organizational session for

now so that the delegations can carry out further consultations on the issues.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to suspend the 2003 organizational session and to resume it at a later date.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Before I adjourn this meeting, I should like to encourage the regional groups to proceed with their consultations on an urgent basis and to submit their nominations as quickly as possible.

Once more, I am extremely thankful to all delegations for electing me and for making possible this organizational session.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.